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ABSTRACT

Communication systems in a divided world can perpetuate tension and violence or can be instrumental in developing unity. In response to this power, communicators must focus on generating worldwide recognition of interdependence in the shaping and sharing of values. Likewise, a responsible communication policy must stimulate the invention and introduction of programs that consolidate public order. Professional associations are the proper forums for initiating research on the effect of technology on message content, as well as for providing norms of critical appraisal of the vehicles of communication. (MAI)

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The Louis G Cowan Lecture
1977

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Harold Lasswell

Communication in a divided world: opportunities and constraints

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The first Louis G. Cowan Lecture was given by Professor Harold Lasswell on 13 September, 1977, in Washington, DC, USA, during the Annual Conference of the International Institute of Communications.

The lecture was introduced by Jean d'Arcy, Chairman, IIC, and Joe Goldsen, Trustee, IIC, and of Yale University.

The International Institute of Communications provides an interdisciplinary forum for those working in the field of communications around the world, be they policy makers, managers, journalists, industrialists, engineers, social researchers or from any other concerned area. It is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit making institution concerned with the present uses and future developments of communications throughout the world. Its activities spring from the conviction that there is an essential need for greater analysis of the cultural, social, economic and legal aspects of communication.

The IIC holds local, regional and international seminars and meetings. It undertakes research of its own and on contract to members and outside organisations. It possesses at its London headquarters a growing library of material, much of it unpublished, including a special collection on satellite communications from their beginnings. Its journal 'InterMedia' provides news and comment of developments in communications issues around the world.

Louis G. Cowan was born in Chicago in 1909 and died in New York in November, 1976. He studied at the University of Chicago and in 1931 obtained a Ph.B. In the 1940s and 1950s he created several innovative radio and TV shows including *The Quiz Kids, Stop the Music, Hollywood Calling, Captain Kangaroo* and *The $64,000 Question.* In 1955 he was appointed Vice President, Creative Services. CBS Inc., and in 1958 President, CBS Television Network. In 1961 he became Director of the Mass Communication Research Centre at Brandeis University and started his own publishing company, Chilmark Press. From 1965-76 he was Director of Special Programmes at the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. He was Chairman of the Publishing Board of *Partisan Review* and Chairman of the Publications Committee of the *Columbia Journalism Review.* Louis Cowan was one of the founders and early Trustees of the International Institute of Communications.

Harold Dwight Lasswell was born in Donnellson, Illinois, in 1902. He studied at the University of Chicago and in 1922 joined the university staff as an assistant in the Department of Political Science, becoming an assistant professor in 1927. At this time, he was both studying for a Ph.D. (which he obtained in 1926) and teaching; among his students was Louis Cowan. Since 1946 Dr. Lasswell has been at Yale University: in 1946 as Professor of Law, Social Sciences, and since 1970 as Professor Emeritus. He has lectured at many universities including Tokyo, Patna in India, Yenching in Peking and Santiago in Chile. He has been President of the American Political Science Association and is President of the American Society of International Law. Dr. Lasswell has written numerous books and articles including *Politics: Who Gets What When and How* (1936); *Language of Politics: Studies in Quantitative Semantics* (1949); *The Future of Political Science* (1961); *The Public Order of Space*(with McDougal and Vlasic (1963); and since 1965 as Professor of Law and Political Science, *Political Communication: The Public Language of Political Elites in India* (1969).

Communication in a divided world: opportunities and contraints

The International Institute of Communications is to be congratulated on the prompt and special recognition that it has given to the distinctive role that Louis G.Cowan played during his lifetime. These memorial lectures will provide a suitable occasion for sharing thoughts on the significance of communication in human affairs. As situations change so, hopefully, will the breadth and depth of our insight and understanding.

I feel especially honoured and challenged by the invitation to give the first lecture in the series. In part the gratification is intensely personal. Louis Cowan was a student of mine at the University of Chicago whose mind and personality responded with characteristic verve, imagination and practicality to the explosive growth of communication in our day. He devoted an expressive lifetime to both riding and guiding the successive waves of the electronics revolution.

A cliche of our historical epoch is that we are living through the great age of communication. It is truly astonishing to remind one another of the perspectives that were current only the day before yesterday. Recall that until a few short years ago we were told that man is the only form of life that truly communicates. The higher animals may grunt and growl but, so it was said, they are unable to form statements, or to think and problem-solve. Today we have overcome the parochialism of the larynx. We have learned something of the syntax gesture, of posture and drill. We lend a respectful ear to the dolphin and the whale, and watch with admiration the meaningful manouvres of the birds and the bees.

Formerly it was customary to think of communication as the use of sound, print, pictures and other signs which could be mobilized to flow through media channels and networks. Such a conception is acceptable as far as it goes. But the concept of communication has widened enormously. It has grown to encompass the entire symbolic impact of any environment – whether social, biological or physical. For instance, we recognize that, whether fully intended or not, those glassy slabs that constitute contemporary highrisers give off messages of disdain for human values. Of course, the idea that architecture and planning communicate is nothing new. Architecture has long been

seen to be at once a technology of material enclosure and a mode of using material enclosures symbolically. Think, for example, of those penitentiary walls that scowl and intimidate anyone who would try to storm the ramparts and free the prisoners. Or consider the architectural language of the powers whose governing elites are entrenched behind fortress walls (i.e. the Kremlin). Contrast the architectural language of more democratic powers where access barriers are at a minimum and imply an invitation to come on in (i.e. the White House).

An important interpretation of the role of communication in human affairs emphasizes its impact on the distribution of population. During the early years of modern industrial society in Great Britain the factory towns clustered around the sources of energy, like water and coal, and the assembling centres of raw materials, like wool and cotton. Before long the process of communication began to play a distinctive part in deploying the population. The top managers of business began to move where they could readily confer with one another. As a result the highrise office building evolved in London and in other metropolitan centres. This was in response to the needs of executives, with their retinue of secretaries, filing cabinets and other data repositories. Today we are exploring the limits of a computer and distance technology that is able to synchronize access with mobility. A communicator may be on the move from place to place or spend most of his time in the countryside. He can have uninterrupted access to centralized systems of information processing, storage, distribution and broadcasting. Presumably the technology of satellite communication will remain on the frontier of change until we learn how to handle brain-to-brain transmission – if eventually we do succeed.

Unused potential

A detached observer of events on Earth may be perplexed by the present state of affairs. Despite the formidable dimensions of communication systems, our technology is only in partial use. Recall how confidently we were told about communication, mutual understanding and peace. Despite such developments as there have been, our world remains dangerously divided. In part, the nation states stay divided in consequence of the expectation of violence. The expectation of violence is that, whether we like it or not, militant confrontation among the powers remains highly probable. Regardless of the

spectacular expansion of trans-boundary communication by the use of letters, postcards, newsprint, radio and television broadcasts (and so on) the world's population remains separate, apprehensive and habituated to engage in an arms race of unprecedented magnitude. It is as though the more we talk the more we differ.

One implication, at least, is *not* to be drawn from this state of affairs. It is *not* that top military, diplomatic, bureaucratic and other official and controlling elements love war and organized violence; or that the rank and file of workers, peasants, middle and upper levels of society are happily committed to war. Quite the contrary. In the arena of world politics, the acceptance of war as a desirable and honourable goal of existence is a minority viewpoint. For the most part it persists in what is left of some tribal societies, where it is typically assumed that war is circumscribed by iron laws of custom.

Yet, although the cult of war is rejected, it cannot be denied that the expectation of violence and the pattern of a divided world persist from year to year. How can we explain the contradiction? For one thing it is assumed by top leadership that it would mean political suicide for them if they were to initiate a drastic change in the political and governmental rules of the power game. It is wildly improbable, for example, that Presidents and Prime Ministers of the USA, USSR, or the People's Republic of China will propose that a position on their general staffs should be offered to their principal rivals among the powers. Neither Carter nor Brezhnev will take the lead. There is little doubt in their minds that their domestic opponents would seize the occasion to mobilize political parties or factional groups throughout the whole body politic against the alleged 'betrayal'. In one-party states the top leadership would break into factions that would reach down to the middle leadership (the mid-elite) and the rank and file.

Suppose we probe more deeply into the factors that help to explain why the leaders of national sentiment, including those in charge of the technology of communication, have not transformed our divided world into a public order that is substantially free of the expectation or the preparation of organized violence.

The self-reference mechanism

In part this dividedness can be laid to a mechanism of response that springs into action when a new environment is experienced directly or when it is mediated by messages. The allusion is to the 'self-reference mechanism'. The name implies that, through time, individual or group

attention moves between the old and the new.

Recall how visitors to a new city or country incessantly compare and contrast it with the hometown or the homeland. 'See the courthouse over there; it's not half as impressive as ours.' 'They don't have coloured television yet; we do.' 'Their stores are strung-out shops; we have department stores.' 'Their kids are glassy-eyed with drugs; ours are not.' 'They assign children to a permanent educational track at an early age; we leave options open.' 'They keep an extended family pattern; we don't.' 'They discriminate by caste and rank; we do not.' 'Their holy places are neglected; not ours.' And so on and on.

It is worth asking how the self-reference mechanism operates since it is an ineradicable component of any communication sequence. *It helps to make a new environment comprehensible.* It discovers equivalences. These equivalences compare the new situation with the features of a familiar situation. The equivalences proceed by the more or less unconscious application of basic categories. These categories cover fundamental human preferences (or values) and specific patterns (or institutions). Individuals and groups value power, for example, whose institutions include government, law and politics. Some institutions are the same in many cultures, and become part of the familiar self of everyone in these cultures. Our visitor recognized the courthouse as an institution familiar to his own culture. Colour-television, on the contrary, was looked for in vain when the self-reference mechanism led the visitor to a search for the information sector of the new environment.

Besides helping to make a new or extended environment comprehensible, the self-reference mechanism also *helps to disclose complementary or incompatible interests.* The cities referred to by the visitor had some institutional equivalents, like courthouses, that were substantially the same, and whose protection against deterioration might be perceived as a common interest. The strung-out shops might or might not be recognized as implying some common economic interests with a supermarket. The same uncertainty of whether particular interests are common or incompatible applied to many other details.

The self-reference mechanism continually *generates side-effects that reaffirm or enlarge the boundaries of the self.* An expanding map of common interests has a characteristic of cardinal significance for world affairs; it carries with it a tendency to crystallize a sentiment of belonging together for a range of purposes that may be very narrow or

very broad. The sentiment of belonging to the same inclusive self becomes particularly vivid when it is perceived as important for the defence or the realization of shared values, such as political security; current and scientific information; production, income and investment; health, safety, and comfort; vocational, professional, and artistic skills; congenial and loyal relationships; respect (basic human rights); rectitude (social responsibility).

When we survey the communications revolution as a whole it is clear that global changes of perspective have indeed occurred. Popular sentiments are less exclusively tied to exceedingly *local* identities and the ordinary focus of attention is less exclusively absorbed by the purely local messages. Attention now goes to *more inclusive intermediate* environments, most of which are *national*. These national identities have become relatively preoccupied with messages about themselves. Unquestionably the communications revolution has broadened perspectives of identity, interest and demand. But this broadening of concern has fallen far short of consolidating an effective, all-encompassing public order than can be relied on to sustain law and order on a *global* scale.

An interesting and relevant early American example of the self-reference effect is provided by the events that led up to the secession of the thirteen colonies from the British Empire and the formation of the United States of America. Beginning about 1735 a series of political controversies divided the colonies and the mother country from one another. Each controversy focussed more public attention than usual on the colonial *self* and the Imperial *other*. The act of focussing had significant direct and side-effects. News directly related to the controversies helped to draw a map of conflicting interests between the colonies and the Empire in commerce and in several other sectors of society. The principal side-effect was to experience a growing sense of common identity on policy matters related to Great Britain. The flow of news and protest generated a self-reference effect that crystallized a sentiment of belonging together. Among the indicators of a new sentiment was the frequent use of an all-inclusive self-label, such as 'The American Colonies.'

An important indicator of change was the handling of news by the colonial press between peak crisis periods. As events immediately related to a controversy dropped off, the amount of news space given to happenings in other colonies did not return to their former low levels. Virginia gave more column inches than before to happenings in Massachusetts, New York and the remaining colonies. The New York

press gave more coverage to Virginia and the other colonies than before. More over the news events were not limited to acts of planning or executing common policies toward London. They might relate to any values sector institution in the colony. There would be local news of government, law and politics; of postal deliveries (enlightenment); of crops (wealth), disease (well-being), schools (skill), marriages (affection), memorials (respect), and special church services (rectitude). The change can be summed up by saying that an expanding awareness among the colonies of a common identity, mutual purpose, and common fate was registered in the intensified flow of communication among and about one another. (Detail is in Richard C. Merritt, *The Growth of American Community 1735-1775*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965).

The self-reference mechanism had a two-way result that is often repeated in world politics: there was a *state-widening* effect among the thirteen colonies, and a *state-reduction* effect on the Empire. Similar results have been commonplace during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Think of the consolidation of national regimes in Europe (Germany, Italy, etc.), the expansion of empires outside Europe, and the subsequent multiplification of national regimes as the colonial empires (Great Britain, France, etc.) broke up. Through the recent changes, notably in Africa, Southeastern Asia, and the Pacific, the self-reference mechanism has fostered a shifting sequence of local identities (traditional tribes and minority districts), new intermediate national identities (that combine tribes, district and urban areas), and new involvements in global institutions.

Mechanisms of partial incorporation and rejection

In addition to the self-reference mechanism it is possible to specify other mechanisms that help to account for the failure of the communications revolution, as thus far experienced, to combine with other conditioning factors to bring about a unified world order. Clues are to be found in the mechanisms that prevent specific world revolutionary initiatives from encompassing the globe. Consider the two principal revolutions of the last two centuries -- the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century and the Russian Revolution of the early twentieth. We call them world revolutions because in each case a new elite sought to establish itself in power on a worldwide scale in the name of a political myth that was strange to the major powers of the time. The French Revolution sought to eliminate feudal landlords and to liquidate many distinctive institutional operations and

myths that gave support to the dominant class. The Russian Revolution aimed at the feudal and bourgeois classes and their sustaining institutions; and they acted in the name of world inclusive revolution.

For our present problem it is relevant to emphasize how these revolutionary waves were stopped short of unifying world order. They were blocked by the successive mobilization of counter-measures taken by the elites in power in the world arena. We are particularly concerned with the management of communication – as well as military, economic and other assets – to prevent universality. The effective mechanisms of communication involved in part the management of identity symbols. By invoking the national identity against a foreign identity, the forces of revolution were reduced to the status of parochial aggressors. In political symbolic terms, the self-appointed spokesmen of all 'mankind' (the French) or the 'proletariat' (the Russians) were cut down to size.

A similar result was augmented by denying the superiority of the outsider in another way. Some features of every revolutionary myth and operational pattern had a great appeal outside the eruptive centre of the revolution. They reached well beyond Moscow or Paris to reach the perspectives of the constituencies of established elites. Some of these established rulers were adroit enough to adopt some of these features as a means of strengthening the claim that it was *not* necessary to give in to a foreign power as a path to a better life. In this way the mechanisms of *partial incorporation* and *partial rejection* were strategies for blocking the spread of the original revolutionary movement until it fell short of becoming the comprehensive world public order. Governments protected themselves against the French partially incorporating specific revolutionary patterns, such as the liquidation of feudal privileges, the adoption of democratic voting arrangements, the acceptance of equality before the law, and the like. The governments that stood against the Russian challengers also depended on partial incorporation and partial rejection. The Nazis, for instance, reaffirmed the symbols and doctrines of socialism at the same time that they reemphasized parochial symbols of the 'nation' and a new distinguishing symbol like 'race'.

The future of global integration

What of the future? Our analysis has no doubt dampened whatever residues may remain of confidence that communications technology automatically generates knowledge and peace. Nevertheless, we must ask if it is possible to outline probable scenarios that show how the restrictive effects of partial incorporation and rejection, and the self-reference mechanism, may be overcome to the advantage of a more integrated system of world public order? Let us focus on a communication process which in conjunction with other features of the social process, *culminate by consent* in a more formal world order. We leave aside – for the time being, at least – the traditional model of global conquest by a dominant power, or the coming of a sudden common threat of occupation from outer space. Or a revolutionary struggle that miraculously fails to devastate the Earth, and ultimately leaves the globe in the hands of a united leadership.

Recall that our analysis of the divided globe drew attention to the fact that top elite members perceive themselves as committing political suicide if they initiate important changes that are designed to combine effective police institutions with existing structures of world public order. A scenario of global transformation must show how the world situation could be changed in ways that would permit top elites to act in support of effective public order without putting their necks on the chopping block. They must, in fact, have realistic expectations of political advantage. Can we outline the conditions that must be met if those expectations would be warranted? Both internal and external conditions must be altered. Support must be forthcoming from within and without. Suppose that mid-elite leaders (with their followers) were to break away from traditional perspectives. Mid-elite leaders would see the advantages of acting across status lines to bring simultaneous pressure to bear on behalf of change. The strategy of simultaneity maximizes the net expected gains of new programmes. The programme of action would call for an existing structure like the UN, or a new transnational structure to consolidate the command of armed police forces, and to exercise the taxing and fiscal authority required to sustain common activities.

Who are the mid-elite elements? They include middle-management and professional levels in the large-scale organizations of public (governmental) and civic (private) order. The mid-elite also includes the top levels of middle sized organizations in territorial or functional sectors.

It is possible to detect when a mid-elite group is rising in power by observing that top-elites are becoming more dependent on recruiting their tacit constituencies and their successors from the group in question. The present point is that if mid-elites become more concerned with the global interdependence of interests, and more involved with sentiments of identity with the world community, the ground is prepared for strategies of simultaneity, of simultaneous cross-boundary pressure for a more perfect world order.

If such simultaneous action is to occur, aroused youth (and many other groups) must withdraw unquestioning support from independent, separate, nation-centred institutions. Perhaps this contingency is not as wild as it might at first appear. In the past, sudden collective seizures have occurred in the population of huge areas. Recall the Christian Crusades, the Muslim Conquest, and other religious awakenings. Recognize that 'psychic infections' have sometimes been disseminated by oral contagion or by mass media in regional areas. We cannot forget the gigantic audiences that have already focussed on the moon probe. In general, the growing interdependencies would seem to establish promising pre-conditions.

The role of the professional communicators

What is the particular significance of all this for professional communicators? After all, the managers, implementers and analysts of communication are a rather small fraction of the world's population. Is there any point in implying that since communication in a divided world exerts a profound influence on keeping us divided, or on bringing us into a more unified global order, professional communicators must accept heavy responsibility for the past and future state of the world?

In weighing their influence we must take into account the fact that a great number of communication managers, implementers and analysts are public officials who are oath-bound to defend the constitutional order of a nation state. Does this imply that they cannot be relied upon to expedite a flow of communication that increases general awareness of interdependence and stimulates the wide-spread consideration of policy proposals that foster integration?

There appear to be numerous examples from among the public officials of all countries of individuals who interpret national needs in ways that are compatible with improving the policy making and executing institutions of the world community. They do not perceive fundamental interests as contradictory; rather, they are seen as complementary.

The complementary viewpoint is fortified to some extent by the emerging body of formal commitment to a number of multilateral treaty obligations, many of which include commitments to open channels of communication. (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [adopted on December 10, 1948, by the General Assembly in the form of a resolution]; the Internal Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, in force since January 3, 1976; the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its optional Protocol, in force since March 23, 1976).

We are well aware of the fact that many specialists in communication are not government officials and therefore are not members of the formal elite or mid-elite of international intergovernmental organizations, nation states, or any other branch of public order. Rather, these communicators belong to the civic order, and are often in controlling positions in private networks, and are therefore in a position to exert effective, if not formal, power.

It is to be hoped that the varied positions in both the public and civic order which are occupied by professional communicators will continue to favour the tacit coalitions that affect the flow of messages. The problem is to maintain and strengthen message flows that foster the two interactive trends that are acknowledged to be of basic importance. One trend is toward worldwide recognition of interdependence in the shaping and sharing of values (political security, prompt and dependable information, health, and so on). The other trend is toward inventing and introducing procedures that consolidate world public order.

Worldwide recognition of interdependence is itself a *cumulative* process that is fed from two principal sources. One source is everyday, routine reporting of *ordinary events* on an increasingly participatory scale. The other source is the anticipation, reporting, and interpretation of *unexpected events*. It is the unexpected event, impinging on a cumulative awareness of interdependence and institutional possibility that is most likely to generate demands for, and further realization of, improved policy procedures in the world community.

A few reminders: We are told of the dangers connected with modern technology and it seems reasonable to anticipate that the first city destroyed by atomic error, criminal miscalculation or military mistake will stimulate unprecedented demands for joint protective action. Suppose that the plates whose interactive surfaces and edges constitute the continents enter into a phase of accelerating activity, and multiply the earthquake disasters of Tokyo, Inner China, California, and elsewhere. It is barely necessary to mention the dangers of infectious

disease, crop failure and food shortage, or fire. As population expands the potential victims of physical, biological and social disaster multiply. It is increasingly probable that genetic engineering may be bringing us closer to some of the threats and opportunities that were formerly in the imagination of professional writers.

Whatever may be our private purposes and roles, it is reasonable to expect that most professional communicators are willing to agree that professional associations are important forums for the critical appraisal and initiation of research on world communication. Especially for critically appraising the impact of giant technology on messages, and of messages on perspectives. Frequently, one hears the question: Is more always better? If it is printed media, who's reading? In radio broadcasting, who's listening? In television, who's looking? In any case what do sophisticated cost-benefit analyses indicate? In what territorial settings and among what cultures, classes, interest and personality groups are there significant impacts? Are self-reference effects becoming more inclusive? Is resistance diminishing to accepting evidence of global common interests and identity? (For instance, is resistance diminishing that is attributable to partial incorporation and partial rejection?)

Many of the research procedures and agencies are already at hand to provide some continuing answers to these questions, and to assist in improving the decision processes of the world arena. It was with a vision of this kind that the International Institute of Communications came into being. Louis G.Cowan felt that he and his professional colleagues had found a means of improving our joint effectiveness; and these hopes and aspirations remain alive among us.